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The CARY POEM

Virtute Excerptae

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THE three White Roses and the Motto of the Coat of Arms were bestowed upon Sir Robert Cary on account of his defeat of the Knight of Aragon, at Smithfield, London, by King Henry Fifth, (1413-1422), in the early years of his reign.

"Then let each one who bears the Cary name
Remember whence his shield and motto came;
Remember, too, the one who brought them o'er
The ocean's waves to this New England shore.
All that the fathers have by valor gained
Must by the sons be valiantly maintained.
Then take the shield; go forward to the fight;
Guard well the roses; may their silvery light
Shine on brave deeds performed for truth and right."

S. C. C.

Virtute Excerptae

"SHAME, shame on every English knight!
Ye cowardly dogs that dare not fight!
I'll back to Spain, and there proclaim
That none dares fight in England's name,
Or risk his life to save her fame."

Thus spoke a haughty Spanish don,
The valiant knight from Aragon:
On Smithfield's meadows he had fought
Against all comers, and had not
Received one wound, nor had one fall;
His skill had served to vanquish all
Who met him on the tourney-field;
He forced them, every one, to yield.
All England's bravest knights had failed;
Not one against his might prevailed.
The wondering people, as they saw
The strongest fall, exclaimed with awe,
"This is not mortal man, we see;
Some demon in man's shape is he;
Or else he has some magic charm
That gives puissance to his arm.
Against such arts 'tis vain to fight;
Who can withstand a demon's might?"

The English knights were filled with shame
At this foul blot upon their fame ;
But none were left who did not fear
To brave the haughty Spaniard's spear.

Six days he fought, and three days more
The herald stood before his door
To give the message loud and clear,
In tones that every one might hear :—
"Ye knights of England, here I bear
My master's challenge : will ye dare
To fight against him ? See his shield,
Three roses white on sable field ;
Two years ago no rose was there,
The shield of all device was bare.
Each rose is sign of victory won
By this brave knight of Aragon :—
The rose of Austria, rose of France,
And rose of Italy ; his lance
Has won them fairly on the field
By making all who met him yield.
Yet one more rose he fain would set
Beside the others. He has met
The bravest men in all your land ;
But none against his might could stand.
Once more I offer, in his name,
A chance to wipe out England's shame.
Before he turns to leave your shore,
He fights this once, then fights no more ;
This time *a l'outrance*, not in jest.
Let England, then, put forth her best.

What knight will meet him? Will ye fight?
Or will ye humbly own his right
To place the rose of England fair
Among the others blooming there?"

All day the herald waits; no knight
Dares venture forth prepared to fight.
A second day he waits; but none
Have yet appeared when sets the sun.
He waits the third day; all the morn
He and his master smile with scorn
To see the English shrink with fear,
And dare not on the field appear.

High noon had past, and toward the west
The sun was hastening for its rest.
'Twas then the Spaniard spoke the word
That flushed the cheeks of all who heard:—
"Shame, shame on every English knight!
Ye cowardly dogs that will not fight!
I'll back to Spain, and there proclaim
That none dares fight in England's name,
Or risk his life to save her fame."

King Henry Fifth was filled with ire,
His angry face turned red as fire.
"And has it come to pass," he cried,
"That we can be like this defied?
Has English valor sunk so low
That we must yield without one blow?
Does not a single knight remain
To save our honor from this stain?

If 'twere not for my kingly rank,
I, who from danger never shrank,
Would straightway take my spear and shield
To drive this braggart from the field.
Oh, for one hour to leave my throne,
And for this day of shame atone!
Ho, English knights, will no one go
To snatch the victory from our foe?"

No knight responded to his call;
A fatal spell seemed cast o'er all.
The strongest had already fought
Against the Spaniard, and 'twas not
Permitted them, e'en had they wished,
Again to enter in the list.
Where they had failed, could others hope
With him who vanquished them to cope?
"'Tis not," they said, "from cowardly fear,
'Tis not because our lives are dear,
That we thus hesitate and shrink
From meeting one who, as we think,
Hath conquered by his magic charms
Our very bravest men-at-arms.
Can weaker men with him prevail,
When we have seen the strongest fail?
To fight would be to die in vain,
And on one's memory leave the stain
Of being he who failed to save
His country's honor, and thus gave
The rose of England to that knave."

Upon the meadow's outer bound
The people from the country round

Had kept a merry holiday
With manly sports and rustic play :
Some looking at the wayside shows,
Some shooting with their strong yew bows,
Some looking at the feats of arms,
Some yielding to the wine-cup's charms.
'Twas from this crowd that forth there walked
A farmer, yet he boldly stalked
Across the field with upright head,
As though he had a right to tread
With men-at-arms the tourney-ring.
He hastened forward towards the king,
And halting there before the throne,
Knelt down to make his purpose known.

"O king," he said, "if I appear
Too bold in thus approaching here,
Know, then, it is for England's sake,
That I have dared this step to take.
Three days have I looked sadly on
And seen this knight of Aragon
Proud England's chivalry defy.
No longer can I thus stand by
In silence, while without one blow
We yield the victory to our foe.
If you will listen to my plea,
I fain would England's champion be.
I am not wholly what you deem ;
Though but a peasant I may seem,
This arm hath often borne a shield,
The other, sword and lance can wield."

"Who art thou, then?" King Henry cried;
To which the other thus replied:
"In days when England knew my fame,
Sir Robert Cary was my name.
Know thou, O king, that long ago
I was thy father's bitter foe.
I held by Richard even when
His cause seemed hopeless; and when men
Were grovelling at King Henry's feet,
Eager his rising sun to greet,
I, with my father, led the few
Who yet by Richard's side stood true.
Hence, as a rebel, our estate
And all our goods stood confiscate;
And, what was harder far to bear,
We were forbidden arms to wear.
No more I hold the name of knight,
But yet my arm retains its might,
And, as I hope, possesses still
A little of its former skill.
Richard I loved, but love still more
The land whose sceptre once he bore.
I was, indeed, thy father's foe,
But that was many years ago;
And since thou now art on the throne,
Thee England's king and mine I own.
Will not my king accept my plea,
And let me England's champion be?
Make me, O king, I humbly pray,
A knight again for just one day.
If I should fail, no harm is done;

If I should win, tomorrow's sun
Sees me just what I was before,
A simple countryman once more :
Grant one day's knighthood, I implore."

The frown upon the royal face
To hopeful smiles at last gave place.
The king drew sword and raised the blade
To give the knightly accolade.
"I give thee back," he said, "the right
To bear the arms and name of knight ;
Sir Robert Cary, rise and go
To try the issue with the foe.
Choose from my stables any steed,
Take any armor that you need,
Forth to the conflict boldly ride,
And humble yonder Spaniard's pride."

Sir Robert kissed the royal hand,
Then hastened at the king's command
To don the armor and prepare
Into the tourney-field to fare.

Meanwhile the rumor ran around
A champion had at length been found.
Each knight and courtier shook his head
In strong displeasuse, as he said :
"To hope for victory were vain
At hands of yonder rural swain.
E'en though he once had been a knight,
'Tis years since he has ceased to fight ;
His hands so long have held the plow,

They cannot have the cunning now
That one must have to guide the spear
Or make a charger halt and veer.
Where we have seen the bravest fail,
Can rustic strength like his avail?
Alas for England when her fate
Is forced on such a boor to wait!"

'Twas thus the knights and courtiers spoke:
But when the common country-folk
Heard what had happened, they began
To sound the praises of the man
Whom they for many years had known
And looked upon as of their own.
"When all his efforts to maintain
King Richard's cause had proved but vain,
And when he lost his rank and lands,
He did not idly fold his hands,
And grumble at the adverse fate
That took away his broad estate:
He came and shared our humble lot,
Exchanged his mansion for a cot,
Became a tiller of the soil,
And joined us in our daily toil;
Yet even in a life so rough
He shows he's made of noble stuff;
None other mows at such a rate,
None other guides the plow so straight,
And none with axe can fell a tree
With such a vigorous stroke as he.
Unbroken colts he loves to train

Till they are subject to his rein,
And always 'tis his greatest pride
To mount the steeds none else can ride.
He does not scorn to take a part
In all our village sports ; his heart
Rejoices with us in our glee,
And none add more to it than he.
He loves to watch the young men race,
And sometimes sets for them the pace ;
Though growing years have clogged his feet,
Few younger men are found so fleet.
Straight to the mark his arrow flies,
The quoit he pitches nearest lies,
In boxing all his blows are sure,
His feet in wrestling stand secure,
No one among us likes to brave
His sturdy strokes at quarter-stave.
Thus, while his work upon the farm
Has added to his strength of arm,
Use has he made of manly sports
To keep the skill once learned in courts.
That skill he shortly will display
And gain a victory to-day ;
For though it may be many a year
Since he has handled shield and spear,
We know his might and do not fear."

Meanwhile, Sir Robert by the aid
Of servants had himself arrayed
In armor, and his heart beat fast

To think that now again at last
He was a knight whose actions bold
Must England's name and fame uphold.
The armor answered all his need ;
He did not care to choose a steed
From out the stables of the king,
But asked the servants that they bring
The horse that he himself had taught
And from his country home had brought.

When armor for the horse was found,
The knight, with an exultant bound,
Leaped on its back and spoke one word,
At which the charger, like a bird,
Flew forth upon the level plain,
Unguided by the spur and rein.
Across the level field it went,
And halted by the Spaniard's tent,
Where still was seen the hanging shield,
Three roses white on sable field.
Sir Robert struck the shield three blows,
One stroke upon each shining rose,
In token that an English knight
Had met the Spaniard's call to fight.

Sir Robert's shield bore no device,
Its silvery surface, smooth as ice,
Was polished so the Spanish knight,
Looking upon that mirror bright,
Saw with a start reflected there
His own three roses white and fair.

Was it an omen that their glow
Should deck the armor of his foe?

The haughty knight of Aragon
Made haste to put his armor on;
The herald hurried to declare
The contest, and the field prepare.

The warriors rode around the ring,
And stopping short before the king,
Saluted him; then rode away
To take their stations for the fray.
The restless chargers pawed the ground,
Their riders waited for the sound
Of trumpets that should give the call
And bid them on each other fall.

At last was heard the welcome sound;
The chargers started with a bound,
And hurried at their topmost speed
Straight toward the centre of the mead.
Each warrior held his spear in rest,
Each drew his shield before his breast,
Till in the middle of the course
They came together with such force
That e'en the ground appeared to shake.
Their lances bent, but did not break;
Each shield received the fearful blow
Struck by the weapon of his foe.
Beneath the shock the horses reeled,
Then sprang aside; around they wheeled

And hastened to their former place,
There turned, and with unslackened pace
Rushed forward to the fray once more,
Met one another as before,
Fell back beneath the mighty shock,
As waves that beat against a rock ;
Each horse upon its haunches sank,
Then sprang again with quivering flank
And galloped to the outer bound
That marked the limits of the ground.

Now came the third charge ; swifter yet
The horses hastened till they met.
Each steed had caught its master's ire,
Their nostrils seemed to breathe out fire
Like that which from the weapons flashed
As each upon the other dashed.
The lances broke like shivered reeds ;
Stumbling to earth, down sank the steeds;
While both the warriors with a bound
Leaped from their saddles to the ground.
Each drew his sword, put forth his strength,
And bravely fought until at length
The strength that work upon the farm
Had given Robert Cary's arm
Enabled him to deal a blow
That cleft the hemlet of his foe
And laid the haughty Spaniard low.

Then from the multitude around
Arose a glad triumphant sound.

The joy found vent in hearty cries
And loud huzzas that rent the skies.
The happiest ones of all the crowd,
The country people, called aloud:
"It is our Robert who has won,
And slain the knight of Aragon.
Did we not say that he could beat
The braggart and his arts defeat?"

While all were praising thus the deed,
The heralds hurried forth to lead
The gallant victor from the ring,
That they might bring him to the king.
There knelt he down and bowed his head;
"I come again, my king," he said;
"Here at thy feet I humbly lay
The knighthood granted for one day.
I thank thee thou didst give this chance
To fight once more with sword and lance.
Permit me quickly to disarm,
And hasten to my waiting farm."

"Not so," the monarch said; "the one
Who such a noble deed has done
Must never cease to be a knight,
And for his country's honor fight.
Such act as yours must needs obtain
Some recompense; do thou retain
Thy knighthood, for thy king commands,
And with it gives thee back thy lands.

All that my father took before
I here and now to thee restore.
One further thing I wish to say :—
To keep in memory this day,
'Tis fitting that the arms you wear
Some token of your deed should bear.
Across the unmarked argent field
That now is on your battered shield,
Make from your foe's a sable bend,
And let the three white roses lend
Their radiance like the stars whose light
Shines through the blackness of the night.
Then, for a motto, I suggest,
What well accords with all the rest,
'By valor plucked ;' the words will show
That those fair roses, white as snow,
Were won by him whose deeds maintained
His country's honor, and thus gained
The right to wear upon his shield
The flowers he plucked on tourney-field.
The English words are rough in sound ;
Somewhere a scholar shall be found
Whose skill your motto can translate
Into the Latin, more ornate.
Sir Robert Cary, rise and meet
The lords and ladies come to greet
The victor in a well-fought fight,
Whose deeds have proved he has the right
To bear the honored name of knight."

Long years had passed since on the tourney field
Sir Robert Cary forced his foe to yield,
And plucked the roses that adorned his shield.

From Holland's shores one sultry summer day,
A little ship prepared to sail away
Across the waters that before it lay.

They who embarked were not of Holland's race ;
Their English lineage showed in every face,
In manhood's strength, and woman's gentle grace.

Ere setting forth, around their pastor pressed
The little flock his words so long had blessed,
While he to them his parting thoughts addressed :

"I cannot go with you, my pilgrim band,
As ye set forth to seek your promised land ;
'Still tarry here,' is plainly God's command.

"In that new land, stand firm for what is right ;
Trust not in men, but in your Master's might ;
Gird on His armor ; fight ye faith's good fight.

"Set free from fear of the oppressor's hate,
Go where God guideth you to labors great,
And lay foundations for a Christian state.

"Read e'er the book ; fear not new light to see ;
Follow the truth, whate'er the truth may be ;
'Twill harm you not : God's truth shall make you free."

At last, the captain, liking not delay,
Declared the time had come ; they must away,
Or lose the tide that tended towards the bay.

There was no help, his word must be obeyed ;
So all knelt down while their dear pastor prayed ;
Farewells were said, the last embraces made.

Then as the current bore the ship along,
They sang with choking lips their parting song ;
At such a time how weak are e'en the strong !

With eyes still fixed upon the fading land,
They saw their pastor kneeling on the strand,
And giving benediction with his hand.

To him who saw them on their voyage start,
It seemed as when to heaven our friends depart,
And we are left to mourn with heavy heart.

But they who saw their pastor on the strand
Remembered Moses, whose uplifted hand
Assured a victory to his feeble band.

O little flock, who long have had the care
Of him who lifts to God that earnest prayer,
The truth he taught you, to the new world bear !

O noble pastor of a noble flock,
Thy God shall guard them from the tempest's shock,
And bring them safely to the waiting rock.

At last the pastor rose, gave one look more,
And turned away to leave the busy shore ;
With slow and weary footsteps passed along

The crowded streets, unheedful of the throng ;
Then turned aside upon a quieter road,
To seek the house where he that night abode.

Meanwhile a youth who wore a student's gown
Had followed him from out the busy town.
He now approached, and in a modest way
Gave evening greeting, then went on to say : —
" Pardon, kind sir, the liberty I take ;
But, if I may, I would inquiry make
Concerning those, your friends, who sailed to-day
To seek a home in regions far away.
I stood upon the wharf and saw them start,
And of their story heard some little part.
More would I learn, that I may understand
The faith that brought them from their native land,
And leads them now to leave this friendly shore
And, doubly-exiled, journey forth once more.
Fain would I learn the secret that controls
The thoughts and actions of such earnest souls."

The pastor grasped the young man by the hand ;
" Welcome ! " he said, " the story of that band
Of earnest pilgrims I will gladly tell :
It may be God, who doeth all things well,
Hath sent thee here to comfort my sad heart
That grieved too much to see those friends depart.
'Twill do me good to speak of those I love,
To tell the faith they have in God above
And in the Word that He hath given to show
How men may serve Him, living here below.

Come in, I pray, and sup to-night with me ;
The friend with whom I stop will welcome thee,
And after meat I will, at your behest,
Tell the whole tale, and answer your request."

The youth assented ; then he told his name,
His age, his family, and whence he came.
He was a gentle youth from Somerset ;
John Cary was his name ; he had not yet
Reached sixteen* summers ; love of learning brought
His feet to Holland that he might be taught
In Leyden's famous schools, where then were found
Teachers whose names were through the world renowned.
The leisure of a summer's holiday
Had tempted him from college halls to stray
Until he reached Delfthaven's busy mart,
Whence he had seen the Pilgrim band depart.

After the supper, as the evening gloom
Gathered about them in the quiet room,
The pastor said, in turning to the youth :
"My little flock sought ever for the truth
In God's own word ; whatever there they found
Became for life a law, for faith the ground ;
Hence those who ask to know their faith must look
Within the pages of the Holy Book.
So, since we each of us have long possessed
The name of him who leaned on Jesus' breast
That he might listen to each precious word
And write for us the wondrous things he heard,
John's Gospel will we take to be our guide

*It may be that John Cary could not in 1620 have been so old as this; but the date of his birth is unknown.

To show the truth in which those men confide."

John Robinson then took the book and read ;
John Cary listened to the words that said
(They were the words of One who spake as man
Ne'er dared to speak, and as man never can) :
"None to the Father comes except by me."
"Know ye the truth, the truth shall make you free."
"When ye have by the Son of God been freed,
Then it is true that you are free indeed,"

These words the pastor read, and added next
Yet other words of Christ to make his text :
"Be not called master ; One alone is Lord ;
All ye are brethren who are sons of God."

The pastor closed the book, and then explained
How these and other truths like these had gained
A place in thoughts of men and made them see
That God, in saving them, had made them free ;
That o'er their faith no man could claim control ;
That God alone was master of man's soul,
While Christian churches did not need to be
Subject to bishops or a priest's decree.
He told him, too, how their desire to gain
Freedom to worship God and to maintain
The simple faith and ways that they deemed best
Had brought them from their homes to seek a rest
Among the Dutch ; till now they heard once more
The call to go and seek a distant shore
Where through God's blessing they might find a land
Prepared by Him to give the Pilgrim band.

Till late at night the two together talked ;
The youth then bade farewell and slowly walked

Back towards his inn ; his heart within him burned
In thinking over all that he had learned ;
New truths within his heart had taken root
To bear in after years abundant fruit.

Returned to Leyden, there he often heard
John Robinson as he explained the Word
Unto that portion of his flock that still
Remained in Holland, waiting till God's will
Should plainly be that they should join the band
Gone out before them to their promised land.

———John Cary's studies had a sudden end :
From distant England came to him a friend,
The bearer of ill tidings, for he said :
"Your father, from a fatal fall, is dead.
To you, who are his eldest son and heir,
I bring the summons that you now prepare
To hasten homeward where for you await
Your rights as owner of the wide estate."

The youth left Leyden on that very day ;
But on his journey met with much delay
From winds at sea, from muddy roads on shore,
And other causes which in days of yore
Made journeys dangerous and all travel slow
To such degree as moderns little know.
Arrived at last, he found that some had thought
To profit by his absence, and their plot
To keep him from his rights was deeply laid.
He pressed his claims, and every effort made
To gain his own ; but in those evil days

The courts worked slowly, and the law's delays
Consumed much time. Meanwhile the young man's foes,
Seeking all means by which they might oppose
His rightful claims and capture his estate,
Aroused against him that religious hate
With which men looked upon his new belief,
Until the young man sought to gain relief
By giving up what seemed a contest vain
For rights and lands that he could not obtain.
Thus, like Sir Robert in the days of yore,
He too was driven from his mansion's door,
He too must leave his old paternal home.
What should he do, and whither should he roam?
It is not strange that he at last crossed o'er
The ocean waves, and on New England's shore
Joined those whom he had seen as they set sail,
And who in him would now a brother hail.

Like Robert Cary, he was strong of heart,
Prepared in honest toil to do his part.
The forests fell beneath his sturdy blows;
The wilderness bloomed forth as doth the rose;
On shore, and hill, and in his garden plot,
With earnest heart and patient zeal he wrought.

As Robert Cary while upon the farm
Preserved his knightly skill and strength of arm,
So his descendant did not lose his zest
For books and learning; he was careful lest
His mind grow dull amidst the constant toil

Within the forests and upon the soil.
Nor studied he alone, for in that band
Of exiles living in a savage land
Were those whose minds, in classic learning trained,
Still loved their books, and studious ways maintained.
With Standish, oft he read of Cæsar's wars ;
With Governor Bradford, studied ancient laws ;
With Elder Brewster, what the Bible said
In Greek and Hebrew tongues he often read.
The Pilgrims soon committed to his rule
The care and teaching of their grammar school.
The first was he upon New England's shore
Who in a school taught Greek and Latin lore.
He, too, it was who many a wintry night,
A pine-wood torch the only source of light,
Taught Governor Bradford, sixty years of age,
To read the Scriptures from the Hebrew page.*

In later years, another home he sought ;
With earnest heart and sturdy arm he wrought,
With other settlers who by patient toil
Cut down the forests, opened up the soil,
And built a town which still retains the name
That told of Somerset, from whence they came.
John Cary was their clerk, for yet his hand
Could wield the pen, as well as till the land.
With chain and level he their lots surveyed,

*"Though I am grown aged, yet I have had a longing desire to see with my own eyes something of that most ancient language and holy tongue in which the law and oracles of God were written ; and in which God and angels spake to the holy patriarchs of old time ; and what names were given to things from the creation."—Gov. Bradford.

Then on his own worked hard with axe and spade
Till he had won, by dint of labor great,
Lands wider far than was his old estate.
The new was, like the old, "by valor won,"
By valor shown with axe and plow and gun;
In felling trees with strong and steady blows,
In midnight conflicts with the savage foes,
And brave endurance of a settler's woes.

The age of chivalry has passed away;
We cannot now on tourney-fields display
Our strength and courage; neither did we flee
From native land to find beyond the sea
Freedom and justice; these we now possess,
And need not seek them in the wilderness.
Yet even now must we fierce battles fight,
And firmly stand as champions of the right.
Valor is needed if we hope to win
Our victories over greed and wrong and sin.
The roses white must we preserve from stain,
And other trophies by our valor gain.
Then let each one who bears the Cary name
Remember whence his shield and motto came:
Remember, too, the one who brought them o'er
The ocean's waves to this New England shore.

All that the fathers have by valor gained
Must by the sons be valiantly maintained.
Then take the shield ; go forward to the fight ;
Guard well the roses ; may their silvery light
Shine on brave deeds performed for truth and right.

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